

A Beautiful Tradition: Adaptation and Ingenuity in a Century of Plateau Women's Art

LESSON PLAN High School

Created by Laura Ferguson for the Montana Historical Society ©2009.
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or call 406-444-4789

Grade Level: High School (9th – 12th)

Subjects: Art/Art History, Social Studies (*Native Americans, Montana or American history*)

Time for Completion: two 50-minute class periods (*or 1 class period and 1 homework assignment*)

Overview

This unit provides an introduction to the art of indigenous peoples of the Plateau region, including three tribes currently in Montana and others who historically used this area for hunting and trade. It includes discussion of Plateau art forms and artistic media that preceded beading, as well as a brief history of the incorporation of beads into tribal art. Students will look at styles, techniques, themes, and changes in Plateau beadwork through a visual gallery of artifacts. A comparison is made between traditional Plateau cornhusk-style bags and beaded bags, in order to illustrate continuity of techniques and aesthetic styles, while emphasizing changing themes, materials and motifs. For comparative purposes, occasional contrasts to Plains-style arts are pointed out so that distinctions can be made.

The purpose of this lesson is three-fold: 1) to demonstrate the continuity of cultural expression and esthetics during a century of rapid change brought by colonialism and the reservation system; 2) to show how indigenous artists adapted traditional skills to accommodate changes in resources, local economies and historical circumstances; and 3) to illustrate the processes by which an introduced medium such as glass beads can be incorporated into indigenous cultures in such a way that the medium becomes an authentic form of native cultural and artistic expression.

Montana Art Standards

Content Standard 2—Students apply and describe the concepts, structures, and processes in the Arts, including composition, techniques, medium, function, and style.

(Benchmarks 2.4 and 2.5 directly apply, benchmarks 2.1-2.3 apply in observation)

Content Standard 5—Students understand the role of the Arts in society, diverse cultures, and historical periods. (Benchmarks 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5)

Content Standard 6—Students make connections among the Arts, other subject areas, life, and work. (Benchmarks 6.1, 6.2, 6.4)

Montana Indian Education for All Essential Understandings

Essential Understanding 1: There is great diversity among tribal Nations of Montana in their languages and cultures. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage.

Essential Understanding 2: There is great diversity among American Indians as identity is developed, defined and redefined.

Essential Understanding 3: The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life and tribal cultures, traditions and languages.

Objectives—In this unit, students will be able to

1. Locate the Plateau region on a map.
2. Identify several Plateau tribes, including three currently in Montana (Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreille). Identify intermontane tribes, such as the Nez Perce, who hunted and traded in Montana.
3. Understand some of the regional, historical, and cultural differences between Plateau and Plains tribes. Make a connection between these cultural attributes differences and art.
4. Identify different types of Plateau art forms and how they are or were made, including indigenous materials and introduced materials, with specific focus on cornhusk-style bags and beaded bags.
5. Recognize the various skills, designs, and utilization of available resources evident in traditional Plateau art forms, which extends to the incorporation of beads into tribal artwork.
6. Identify various compositional themes, design types, and techniques in Plateau beadwork, and define various terms related to three-dimensional art and to beadwork in particular.
7. Gain an introductory understanding of how European and American colonialism in the West initiated changes in daily life that in turn required adaptation and ingenuity on behalf of indigenous artists.
8. Observe some of the changes in Plateau art, specifically beadwork, between the 1880s and 1940s, including changes in media, function, style, and composition.
9. Understand how introduced media (beads) have been incorporated into indigenous cultures in a manner that allows for authentic continuity of an indigenous cultural aesthetic.
10. Appreciate the role of art and artistic expression in and to Native American cultures past and present, and understand the importance of art to cultural and personal identity.

Materials Needed

- **“A Beautiful Tradition” CD or online resources which include PowerPoint** slides, lesson plans, and worksheets.
- **Digital projector for viewing the accompanying PowerPoint**, or a computer lab if students are viewing the slideshow individually. (The slideshow could also be printed and hard copies distributed to the students, but the images are much better viewed on a computer in color. Additionally, this allows students to zoom in on details.)
- **Internet access for viewing maps** (also needed if accessing additional resources or complementary curricula). Maps could be downloaded and printed, if necessary.
- **“Tradition, Design, Color: Plateau Indian Beaded Bags from the Fred Mitchell Collection”** – a catalog produced to accompany a temporary exhibit of Plateau women artists’ beaded bags, 1880-1940, at the Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana, May 14, 2009 – October 3, 2009. To obtain complimentary copies of this exhibit catalog for use in the classroom, contact the Education Division of the Montana Historical Society at 444-4789. This Lesson Plan is designed to be used in conjunction with this exhibit catalog; however, if desired, this unit may also be used as a stand-alone lesson without the catalog.

Suggested Reading

If you can, please obtain or borrow through interlibrary loan the following book and have your class read these selected pages.

A Song to the Creator: Traditional Arts of Native American Women of the Plateau, edited by Lillian A. Ackerman, copyright 1995 University of Oklahoma Press. Read **pages 5-8**: (“Introduction” and “First Contact and History”) and **pages 106-117** (“Beadwork and Cultural Identity on the Plateau”). Be sure to observe the photographs and accompanying descriptive captions. Optional reading: **pages 9-15**: “Traditional Plateau Women’s Roles and Life Cycle,” and “Contemporary Plateau Women.” Total reading time is 30-45 minutes.

Procedures and Activities

1. If including the suggested readings, these may be done prior to or after the PowerPoint.
2. View the PowerPoint slide show, narrating from the text. You might print the text for student reference as well, as it will be useful in completing the worksheet.

3. View and locate on a Map: Plateau region; Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreille tribes; Nez Perce traditional area; their neighboring tribes. (Note: all of the books listed under *Suggested Reading* and *Additional Resources* have good maps.)
4. Have each student choose one piece of art to analyze. You may choose to print these.
5. Complete the worksheets provided in this lesson. This can be done as a take-home assignment if students are able to print in color the image they chose to use for the analysis component of the worksheet. Answer keys are provided.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Suggested, not required. Some of these printed materials may be purchased through the Montana Historical Society's museum store and may qualify for purchase using *Indian Education for All* funds to school libraries from the Office of Public Instruction. Contact the Office of Public Instruction's Indian Education Division before ordering. They may also be available by Inter-library Loan.

Complementary Curricula

Montana's Office of Public Instruction, Indian Education Division has a 10th grade math curriculum related to beadwork, geometry, and patterning. Visit OPI's Indian Education website at <http://opi.mt.gov/IndianEd2/> for more information. This two class-period lesson links art to math.

Printed Materials

(The first three of these books relate to Plateau tribes, the fourth relates to Plains tribes.)

A Song to the Creator: Traditional Arts of Native American Women of the Plateau, edited by Lillian A. Ackerman. University of Oklahoma Press, c. 1995. Includes historical overviews and a good description of pre- and post-contact arts and cultures, maps, interviews with present-day women artists, oral histories, and tribal stories. ISBN 0-8061-2876-3 (paperback). Available from online booksellers.

A Persistent Vision: Art of the Reservation Days by Richard Conn. (A Guide to the L.D. and Ruth Bax Collection of the Denver Art Museum) Catalogues and describes clothing and artistic artifacts from Plateau, Great Basin and Plains tribes from the 1880s through the 1940s. Hundreds of photographs and informative descriptions. ISBN 0-295-96429-4 paperback. 190 pages. c.1986, Denver Art Museum.

People of the River: Native Arts of the Oregon Territory by Bill Mercer. Copyright 2005, Portland Art Museum. Surveys a vast amount of Plateau arts from ancient stone carvings

up to the beadwork of the 1950s. Arranged by type of art and era, this book contains hundreds of photographs with helpful descriptions, as well as introductions to various forms of Plateau art such as stone and wood carvings, basketry, and beadwork. Bill Mercer is currently the Curator of Ethnology and the Museum Programs Manager at the Montana Historical Society in Helena. Available at the Montana Historical Society's store: www.mhs.mt.gov, 444-2890.

Identity By Design: Tradition, Change, and Celebration in Native Women's Dresses, edited by Emil Many Her Horses, published by the Smithsonian Institute (2007). This excellent resource focuses primarily on historical and contemporary decorative clothing traditions of Plains tribes, with a few Plateau and Great Lakes regional examples. May use IEFA/OPI funds for school purchase. Online: http://www.nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/identity_by_design/IdentityByDesign.html.

Online Exhibits and Resources

These are very good resources for photographs and further information if your students have time to browse through them or if you want additional information.

Burke Museum, University of Washington, Plateau Arts Gallery. Samples of Plateau arts, except cornhusk-style bags. Items grouped by media and type. Go to: <http://www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/collections/>. Under "Research and Collections" click on "Ethnology," then type "Plateau" into search box.

Northwest Museum of Art and Culture in Spokane, Washington. An excellent repository of Plateau tribes' artifacts and arts. They have an online gallery as well as links to several other regional museums and galleries. Go to: <http://www.northwestmuseum.org>, then click on the tab "Exhibits and Collections" at the top of the page for images; for their online digital collections, go to the "Research" tab, then click on "online resources." Some of the useful links from the Northwest Museum's website are:

American Indians of the Pacific Northwest

American Memory Project

Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest

Center for the Columbia River

University of Washington Digital Collections

Washington State University Digital Collections

Living Legacy: The American Indian Collection, a temporary exhibit, is at the Northwest Museum from July 2008, through July 18, 2010.

National Museum of the American Indian is part of the Smithsonian Institute and has digital collections for viewing as well as curriculum for all grade levels. Visit: <http://www.nmai.si.edu/>.

Maps can be found at <http://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/maps.html>. The map titled "Nez Perce and their neighbors" is the most accurate and gives a sense of the overlap of many tribes as well as the extensive territory of the Nez Perce, who frequently traded

with the Crow/Apsaalooke (Plains) and who also interacted with the Shoshone (Great Basin). Not all tribes are identified, but these maps give you a basic idea of who some of these tribes are and where they are and were located. (The first map in this series—which lists the tribes of the Northwest Coast—is provided just for reference.) Please note that the term “Flathead” is often used to refer to the inland Salish.

For students interested in learning more about beading techniques, designs, and history these websites may be useful:

<http://www.nativetech.org/glasbead/glaswork.html>

http://www.kstrom.net/isk/art/beads/art_bea2.html

Montana Museums

Great fieldtrips! These are a few with native artifacts, including beadwork.

Montana Historical Society Museum, 225 N. Roberts St., Helena Montana, 59620.
Phone (406) 444-4789 or visit <http://mhs.mt.gov/education/default.asp>.

People’s Center, Pablo, Montana.

Museum of the Plains Indian, Browning, Montana.

Fort Belknap Cultural Museum, Harlem, MT (Gros Ventre and Assiniboine)

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